

Associated Baptist Press

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South Carolina newspaper promotes Kirkland to editor

GREENVILLE, N.C. (ABP) -- Don Kirkland, associate editor of the Baptist Courier of South Carolina, was elected editor by the newspaper's trustees Dec. 15. He will assume his new duties March 1, 1996, when the retirement of longtime editor John Roberts takes effect.

Kirkland, 52, has been a member of the state Baptist newspaper's staff for 21 years, first as assistant and since 1983 as associate.

Kirkland was recommended for the editorship by a five member trustee search committee, headed by Earl Crumpler of Greenville. "We have given serious study to 16 resumes and recommendations," Crumpler told the board. "Most of them are well qualified, but none more so than Don Kirkland."

The board, with 14 of its 15 members present, elected Kirkland by unanimous vote.

Roberts had high praise for Kirkland. "He is eminently qualified for the editorship," Roberts said, "and I am highly pleased by the board's choice. He is committed to the ministry of Christian journalism. I am proud to have been his mentor for 25 years, 21 of those years at the Baptist Courier."

"Don Kirkland knows and loves South Carolina Baptists, and has learned his craft well," Roberts added.

"As editor," Kirkland said, "I intend to stay out of political squabbles that divide us and sap our spiritual strength, I aim to support wholeheartedly the ministries that South Carolina Baptists are carrying out through the Cooperative Program, and I want to do all I can to help strengthen our convention's churches."

Roberts will complete 30 years as editor when he retires, the longest tenure of any current Baptist editor. Kirkland will be the 10th editor in the Courier's 127 years.

The editor-elect was born in Columbia, S.C., and spent most of his boyhood in Lancaster, S.C. His father, the late Lewis Kirkland, was a Baptist pastor and director of missions in the state.

Kirkland is a graduate of Anderson College and the University of South Carolina. He studied at Southeastern Seminary, completing his master's degree work at Erskine Seminary.

Kirkland's wife, Linda, is a teacher at Riverside High School in Greer. The couple has two grown children and one grandchild.

North Carolina Baptist Men settle lawsuit out of court

EAST ST. LOUIS, Ill. (ABP) -- A North Carolina Baptist disaster-relief team has settled out of court with an Illinois woman who claimed her children were burned from hot coals dumped on the ground by a volunteer worker.

According to Associated Press, lawyers for Karen Harris offered the settlement Dec. 7, just before closing arguments were to begin on the third day of a jury trial.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported the settlement was between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

Harris sued North Carolina Baptist Men, Inc., and the American Red Cross for \$2 million after the accident at a flood-relief site in Hardin, Ill., in August 1993. The Red Cross settled out-of-court earlier for \$10,000.

Harris contended that a volunteer with the Baptist group dumped hot charcoal from a grill on the ground and her children were burned when they stepped on it. Katy Harris, 2, suffered third-degree burns on her left foot and required skin grafts. Harris' son, Dustin Williams, also was burned.

Harris' medical bills exceeded \$40,000, some paid by insurance.

The Baptist group had filed a countersuit charging negligence by Harris, saying she should have seen the grill, which was located about two feet from a bench where she was sitting.

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-- By ABP staff

Baptist leaders denounce racism

McLEAN, Va. (ABP) -- A cross-section of Baptist leaders in the United States condemned racism Dec. 14 and called on their denominations to "implement justice and harmony."

"Racism is a sin and contrary to biblical and Christian teachings," the group said in a consensus statement issued at a Dec. 14 press conference at the Baptist World Alliance headquarters in McLean, Va.

"Racism destroys the dignity of the victim and perpetrator. Racism destroys the social fabric of society and is a cancer which will destroy our society, if we do not act quickly to eliminate it from our churches, schools and society at large," said the group, which included three Southern Baptist leaders.

The statement noted that the Baptist constituency in America numbers more than 50 million people.

In addition, the leaders issued a call to:

- take concrete actions that demonstrate the authenticity of repentance;
- move beyond polite and politically correct language to frank dialogue about racism and prejudice in society and all levels of church life;
- disavow race-based economic and political exploitation and call on Baptist leaders to embrace and implement a biblical vision of justice;
- use the collective influence of Baptist communions to call the nation to prayer and repentance and seek healing.

They also agreed to a follow-up meeting in the next six months for implementation of the plan.

Denton Lotz, Baptist World Alliance general secretary, called the group together because he said Baptists in the United States ought to "speak with one voice against racism." Even though the BWA represents 187 conventions worldwide with a constituency of more than 100 million, Lotz said that recent events, such as the O.J. Simpson trial and the Million Man March, have caused the issue of racism to re-emerge in the United States.

"The call of Christ is a call to participate in the suffering of humanity, it is a call to prophetic action in the face of the demonic forces which would divide and defeat us," he said.

Jim Henry, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said the meeting was important because of the cross-section of leaders who came together to focus on the nation and to address racism. He said the meeting built mutual understanding and led to a decision to move forward and deal with the sin of racism in a concrete manner.

If the church can't deal with this sin, society won't be able to either, he said, adding that the church must lead the way.

Other Southern Baptists participating were Gary Frost, second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Ernest Mosley, executive vice president of the SBC Executive Committee.

Dan Weiss, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches, USA, called the meeting and subsequent statement an important first step. "We need to work hard to achieve racial reconciliation," Weiss added.

Among the other participants were: Jere Allen, executive director/minister, District of Columbia Baptist Convention; Ronald Bobo, pastor, Westside Missionary Baptist Church, St. Louis; Harold Carter, pastor, New Shiloh Baptist Church, Baltimore; John Chaplin, first vice president, National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.; Roscoe Cooper, general secretary, NBC, USA; Jack Kwok, director, department of Cooperative Ministries with National Baptists, Arkansas Baptist State Convention; Robert Mobley, president, Czechoslovak Baptist Convention, USA & Canada; John Peterson, pastor, Alfred Street Baptist Church, Alexandria, Va.; Tyrone Pitts, general secretary, Progressive National Baptist Convention; Cessar Scott, general secretary, Baptist General Convention of Virginia; Bennett W. Smith, president, PNBC; Elaine Smith, president-elect, American Baptist Churches, USA; Wallace Charles Smith, senior minister, Shiloh Baptist Church, Washington; and Philip Yntema, executive director, North American Baptist Conference.

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-- By Pam Parry

Vineyard Association kicks out Toronto church

ANAHEIM, Calif. (ABP) -- The Toronto church which attracted world attention with its so-called "laughing revival" has been kicked out of the Association of Vineyard Churches for its emphasis on "exotic" phenomena.

The Toronto Airport Vineyard claims 600,000 people have attended a revival which broke out in the church in January 1994, including 20,000 Christian leaders and 200,000 visitors from virtually every country and denomination.

The revival has become controversial, even in the Vineyard Association, over reports of worshipers becoming "drunk" in the Spirit, laughing uncontrollably or, in some cases, roaring like lions. The phenomenon has been carried to churches scattered worldwide, and even was blamed as a factor in the firing of a Southern Baptist missionary in Singapore.

Recently the Vineyard association, based in Anaheim, Calif., expelled the Toronto congregation, saying it had moved beyond the association's view that the purpose of renewal is to equip, train and release people. The Toronto Vineyard has crossed a line, putting more emphasis on "being touched by the Holy Spirit" than on equipping, which is treated as "incidental or non-existent," association leaders wrote in a Dec. 8 letter to Vineyard pastors.

"We are committed to 'power evangelism,' not just 'power;' we are committed to 'signs and wonders and church growth,' not just 'signs and wonders,'" wrote a representative of the Association of Vineyard Churches board.

A Southern Baptist missionary fired Dec. 12 for charismatic practices was accused of incorporating elements of the "Toronto blessing" into his church in Singapore. But the former missionary, Charles Carroll, said the practice of "falling in the Spirit," which is part of worship in the church he serves as pastor, is unrelated to the Toronto revival.

In a Nov. 27 letter of termination, Carroll's supervisor, Clyde Meador of the Foreign Mission Board, said the "Toronto blessing," is "contributing to causing dissension among the churches" of the Singapore Baptist Convention.

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-- By Bob Allen

High rollers, not Santa Claus, putting games in stockings

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Casinos, not Santa Claus, may be putting some electronic games in children's stockings this Christmas.

And their intent, according to a political consultant from Longview, Texas, is to create a new generation of gamblers -- a charge industry spokesmen deny.

More than a year ago, Richard Blankenship began noticing something odd in his local newspaper. Retailers advertised electronic versions of poker and blackjack next to LEGO blocks and Power Ranger toys.

Suspecting a link between the commercial gambling industry and the electronic games, he made a list of the games' manufacturers and asked a local broker to research them.

Blankenship -- a 1984 graduate of Baylor University who attends First Baptist Church in Longview -- found that Radica Games, Ltd., and Tiger Electronics, Inc., dominated the market.

He discovered that Radica had sold at least 9 percent of its stock to International Game Technology and had agreed to begin manufacturing gambling machines for IGT.

He also found that Tiger Electronics makes casino-style electronic games under the "Bicycle" name, a registered trademark of the U.S. Playing Card Co. Tiger also manufactures games sold under the trademark "Caesar's Palace," a subsidiary of Caesar's World, Inc., a major Las Vegas casino operator.

"So there you have it," Blankenship said. "The toy casino game manufacturers are linked with the world's largest maker of slot machines (IGT) and one of the pre-eminent casinos in Las Vegas (Caesar's Palace) and the U.S. Playing Card Co."

Diversification is not the casinos' goal, he maintains. He believes the gambling industry is investing in its own future by spawning a new generation of casino customers.

"The gambling industry is driven by greed," said Blankenship. "Their goal is to take your money by any means possible. If that means entering into agreements with toy manufacturers and computer software companies to familiarize children with gambling, they'll do it because they know that translates into future profits," Blankenship said.

"They also know that a generation of computer literate, video-oriented youth will be more receptive to playing electronic casino games, whether hand-held or computer-driven," he added.

Most of the electronic versions of casino games carry disclaimers saying that they are not meant for gambling purposes. But the owner's guide of "Las Vegas Casino Corner," a product of Micro Games, makes no pretense about the product's "educational" value.

"Practice our games to sharpen your skills and, after you have learned with us, you won't be surprised by the games in Vegas," the manual said.

Nancy Jablin, marketing and promotion manager for Micro Games, said the instructions are "just a fun way of encouraging people to play our product. Our intention is not to encourage bad behavior."

Jablin, along with Harold Stone, marketing director for Radica, and Jamie Roth, public relations and promotion specialist for Tiger Electronics, said their companies market casino-style games to an adult audience.

"I don't think it is appropriate to market these games to children. We prefer to market them to the adult segment of the public," Roth said.

Most children would be "bored to death" playing the casino-style games because they involve making deliberate choices, not quick hand-eye coordination, Stone said.

Roth said she was not aware that retailers were advertising the casino-style games alongside children's toys. She added that Tiger had no plans to instruct retailers how to promote the sale of their products.

Stone said his company wants to be known as a maker of "adult gaming devices," and prefer they be sold in retailers' electronics departments rather than in toy sections.

"We're kind of stuck there, but we'd prefer not to be," he said. "Our games are not something you probably would want to give your kids."

The proliferation of electronic casino-style games particularly is disturbing, Blankenship said, because it contributes to the growing problem of teen gambling.

A 1992 survey by the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse revealed that 79 percent of Texas teenagers have gambled for money. The survey showed that 5 percent of teens are problem gamblers and another 12 percent are at risk of developing problems.

Researchers say at least 1 million of the estimated 8 million compulsive gamblers in the United States are teenagers. And many gambling counselors say that about 7 percent of their case loads involve adolescents.

The proliferation of casino-style electronic games in video arcades and their sale for home use serve a dual purpose for the gambling industry, said Weston Ware, associate director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission. "They use them for education in the skills of gambling and for leverage in their efforts to introduce video gambling machines into our state."

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